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LITTLE ELSIE'S SUMMER AT MALVERN.

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"She suddenly found herself lifted up in the air by a pair of rough, good-natured arms."—Page 26.

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AT MALVERN.

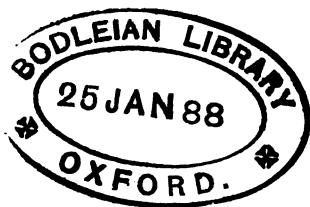
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LITTLE ELSIE'S SUMMER AT MALVERN.

CHAPTER I.

“GOOD-BYE, my darling! my own little sun-beam! Take care of grannie, and every one, and grow into a big strong woman by the time we come back for you.”

And Major Campbell caught his little daughter up in his arms for a long hug, and then hurried away without trusting himself for any more last words, while Elsie looked after him with her great wondering eyes, which would have been full of tears, only that Elsie, unlike most children, never cried when she was really unhappy. Mrs Campbell could scarcely speak; but she bent down and pressed her darling very close, and Elsie could feel mamma's tears dropping fast on her face.

“My dearest, indeed you must go!” said her husband returning. And with a smothered “God bless and keep my treasure,” Mrs Campbell drew down

her veil, and walked with a firm step to the carriage; while grandpapa lifted poor forlorn little Elsie on his shoulder, and carried her down to the gate, that she might look after the carriage as long as papa's white hat, or mamma's handkerchief, could be seen waving from the window.

When even that had quite disappeared, grandpapa looked very kindly at the little pale disconsolate face, and tried to say something to comfort her, but Elsie did not seem to hear him; so he carried her back to grandmamma who was standing amongst her rose-trees in the garden. He begged her to look after the poor little maid, and then walked away, whistling for his great black retriever "Sambo," who soon came bounding up, and, as if he too were sorry for little Elsie's loneliness, thrust his cold nose into her hand, and dirtied her white frock with one great paw, before he obeyed his master's second summons.

Little Elsie was nearly eight years old. She was an only child, and had never been parted from both papa and mamma before; but Mrs Campbell had been ill, and the doctor had advised her going for a tour amongst the fresh, bracing Scotch mountains; and as little girls of eight years old are not the best companions in rough mountain travelling, Elsie's parents very reluctantly decided to accept grandpapa's and grandmamma's kind offer of keeping the



"Grandpapa lifted poor forlorn little Elsie on his shoulder."—Page 2.

little woman at their pretty Malvern villa, until she should be reclaimed.

Mr and Mrs Mordaunt were not at all like the usual type of grandpapa and grandmamma described in story-books : they were quite middle-aged people, for Mrs Campbell had married very young indeed. Grandmamma had been a great beauty, and still had a very sweet fair face, and great bright brown eyes, not unlike Elsie's.

Elsie's mamma was Mrs Mordaunt's eldest child ; and there were three younger ones, Aunt Ina, who was just nineteen, and very pretty, and two school-boy uncles, to whose return for the holidays Elsie looked forward with a mixture of dread and delight.

"Well, my poor little woman," said grannie, stooping down to look at the sorrowful face, as soon as grandpapa and the dog had walked away, "what must we do to comfort each other ? I don't want to cry, Elsie, if I can help it, and I am feeling very sad at losing mamma. What can you do to amuse me, and keep me cheerful ?"

Elsie laughed a little at this ; and then grannie proposed that she should go and get her hat, and that they should help each other to gather some fresh flowers for the drawing-room. "And if you like," continued grannie, smiling, "we will go to the kitchen-garden. I cannot help fancying that Martin may have something to show us."

Elsie ran into the house, and presently was heard shouting, "Bonny! Bonny!" the name by which her nurse (who was really called Mrs Bond) had been known ever since Elsie had given it to her in her first baby attempts to speak. The large straw hat and garden tippet were soon found, and Elsie, with her little face almost bright again, eagerly hurried grannie along to the kitchen-garden.

Martin's round face looked even more smiling than usual as he came to meet them.

"Well, Miss Elsie, I don't know as you'll care about 'em, but I did ask my son to get 'em for you, sure enough."

So saying, he handed Elsie what looked like a huge bee-hive, wrapped up in green baize, but which upon investigation proved to be a wicker-work cage, containing two of the dearest little white doves that Elsie had ever seen, with ruby eyes, and black rings round their necks. They seemed not at all frightened by Elsie's jump and scream of delight, and only stretched their graceful necks and made themselves a little taller, as if to take a general view of their new mistress. Of course, Elsie could not be content without carrying them in to show Bonny, who was well pleased to see her little lady looking so much brighter. A pleasant half-hour was spent by both in sitting on the floor watching the pretty creatures, and coaxing them with sugar and soaked bread.

By that time the one o'clock bell rang, and Bonny had to go to her dinner. Elsie, after washing her hands, ran down to the dining-room, where she was to dine at the elders' luncheon-time.

After dinner, grannie sent her out for a walk with Bonny on the breezy common, which they could reach in a few minutes without going through the town.

Then came tea, and after that the hour which Elsie had been secretly dreading, for it was usually her happiest time in the day, when mamma always devoted herself to her little daughter's amusement, and told her stories, or played quiet games, and papa often came in for a grand game of romps before carrying her off on his shoulder to bed.

Elsie dawdled over tea, and prolonged the operation of changing her frock, and then began to feel rather disconsolate, for the doves were gone to roost, and she did not feel in the humour to play at ball by herself.

Just then there came a light quick step along the passage, and Aunt Ina's bright face looked in.

"Elsie dear, would you like, if you are dressed, to go to grannie's sitting-room? She will have plenty of time before dinner, if you are quick."

Now "grannie's room" was by far the prettiest and most cheerful in the whole house. It opened out of her bed-room, and was not very large; but though there were a great many pretty things in it,

there seemed to be always room to move about and play ; not like the large drawing-room down-stairs, where Elsie was in constant terror of breaking or spoiling something, if she ran across the room, or played "hide-and-seek" under the tables.

Grannie was reading when Elsie came to her, but she shut up her book the moment the little face appeared.

"Come in, childie : I was expecting you. Now, how are we to amuse each other this evening ? Would you like to play spillikins or dominoes ? or shall I tell you a story ?"

"I should like a story best," said Elsie. And grannie laughed and said, she must ransack her memory ; but either she was tired, or, like Elsie, her thoughts were wandering after the dear ones far away,—no story would come into her mind that evening. Suddenly Elsie's eyes, which had been wandering round the room, rested on something which made her exclaim, "Prince Rupert's foot ! O grannie ! do tell me the story about him, and papa, and the great battle !"

"*That* story, darling !" said grannie, doubtfully, "you know it so well—but never mind, you shall have it, if you like. But first bring that footstool here, and come and rest your little head against my knee, and then you will look just like mamma twenty years ago."

The *something* on which Elsie's eyes had lighted was a horse's hoof, beautifully mounted and set in silver, which stood on grannie's writing-table. And this was the story that belonged to it :—

“ You know, my little Elsie, that seven years ago we did not, as now, enjoy a happy time of peace ; not only in our own dear England, but in nearly all the countries of Europe. Seven years ago there was a great war being carried on between the Russians on one side, and the “ allies,” as England, France, and Turkey were then called, on the other.

“ Hundreds of our brave soldiers had to leave their homes, and their wives, and little children, and sail in ships to the country called the Crimea (you have seen it in your map, haven't you ?—the little bit between Russia and the Black Sea), and there they had to endure cold and sickness and fatigue ; and they bore it all so bravely and patiently, as English heroes should, though it was much harder than actual fighting, because there was no excitement to carry them on. You were a wee baby then, my Elsie, and mamma could not leave you, or else I think she would have gone out with her husband ; as so many brave English ladies did, enduring privations greater almost than I can describe, in order to be at hand to nurse those they loved best, in case they should be wounded or sick.

“ Well, at last, on the 20th of September, the

great battle of the Alma was fought. We at home, who heard of it, were only too happy over the victory, and the safety of many of our dear ones ; and some people even said that now the war would be at an end, and the troops sent home ; but alas ! this was indeed a mistake.

“Some more weary weeks of waiting and suffering followed, and then came another glorious battle,—the battle of Balaklava ; and the charge of the three hundred (papa’s charge, as my Elsie calls it) was one of the grandest sights of the day.

“You remember that papa’s regiment was named the Scots Greys, partly, I believe, because they always ride gray horses. Well, there was a little band of three hundred mounted soldiers (cavalry, you know, they are called), part of papa’s regiment, and part of some gallant Irish troops called the Inniskilling Dragoons. These were opposed to a huge Russian army of nearly ten times as many soldiers. Does it not sound as if our little band could have no chance ? But they were brave determined men, ready to follow to the death the white-haired general who commanded them ; and he was one well worthy of their confidence.

“Well ! there they sat on the horses, all erect and still like statues, and the immense gray mass (for the Russians wore a dark-gray uniform) came slowly sweeping down the hillside to crush them.

But all at once—I cannot tell you why—the Russian troops began to move slower,—and then, they halted altogether. There was a pause,—and General Scarlett, who was commanding the Scots Greys, turned round to his trumpeter, and gave the order to sound the charge.

“The ground was rough and uneven, and the soldiers were obliged to be careful that their horses did not stumble ; but General Scarlett’s charger was a magnificent animal, and made nothing of the difficulties. On he galloped, with only one officer, his aide-de-camp, Major Elliot, by his side ;—on—on, till they were some distance in front of the rest of the troop, and close to the Russians.

“Papa told me afterwards that he never could forget that moment of seeing his gallant old leader hemmed in, and surrounded by his enemies, with only his sword to defend him, which he kept waving and flashing round his head to keep them off. You have seen papa do the sword exercise, have you not ? Papa longed so to be by General Scarlett’s side ; but poor Prince Rupert, although so good and faithful, was not a swift horse, and papa was obliged to be content to charge with the rest. There was one officer called Major Clarke, on a beautiful horse named “Sultan,” which got so excited, and plunged about so much, that his rider lost his bear-skin cap, and fought on without any protection to his head.

"But I cannot stay to tell you all the particulars of that glorious charge now, my Elsie,—indeed, many of them would be too sad and dreadful for your ears.

"Papa was badly wounded in the leg, in saving the life of a young officer who fought near him, and who was one of his greatest friends (you know papa still walks rather lame), but he managed to keep his seat, and to go on fighting, and he knew that as long as Prince Rupert was unhurt he would be safe ;—but when at last the sword of a dismounted Russian soldier wounded the good horse deeply in the shoulder, so that he was bleeding fast, papa thought that it was all at an end with him, and that he should never see poor mamma or little Elsie again. Oh ! how he prayed for them both, even in all the excitement of the battle, and prayed, too, that God would be merciful, and would take him to heaven, if he did indeed die now. And at home mamma was sitting with her baby on her knee, thinking of him, and praying, too, in her heart that God would have mercy, and keep him safe. And those prayers were heard, and papa was spared, thank God, to come home safe to his dear ones again.

"He was getting very weak and faint from loss of blood, and could hardly manage to keep using his sword to defend himself, but the young officer

whom he had saved, stayed near him, and warded off many a blow that would otherwise have killed him.

“At last, above the noise and confusion and clashing of swords, a loud clear voice was heard, shouting, ‘Rally! The Greys!’

“It was the adjutant, Captain Miller, and he meant that the soldiers should try to get into an orderly line again. You can fancy how difficult this was when they were fighting right in the midst of their enemies; but a soldier's first duty is simply to obey.

“And now another regiment came charging up the slope to help the gallant Greys and Inniskillings, and by degrees they were no longer so fearfully out-numbered.

“Sir James Scarlett had fought his way completely through the Russian troops, and was coming out on the other side—his men were following him; but alas! poor Prince Rupert's strength was almost gone, and papa knew that, once dismounted, there was no hope for him, since the wound in his leg made walking impossible. His friend had been separated from him too, and weakness and pain were making him dizzy and half-blind. At last he dropped the reins altogether; he laid his hand on Prince Rupert's beautiful silver mane, and in the kind caressing voice to which the good horse was

always accustomed from his master, urged him forward. The brave creature seemed to feel that all must depend on his holding out a little longer. He rallied all his strength and spirit, and even tried to toss his head in answer to the caressing hand. Two or three more desperate strides carried them beyond the ranks of the enemy, and then two officers, friends of papa's, who saw his pressing need, came up to help him.

"He just managed to dismount, the poor horse standing quite still, although trembling all over. Hurt as he was himself, papa's first thought was for his faithful charger ; but it was too late. As papa dismounted, Prince Rupert sank down, and rolled over quite exhausted ; he died in a few moments, watching his master to the last, as if to feel assured of his safety.

"Now, Elsie, you know why amongst all my treasures I value none more highly than poor Prince Rupert's hoof in its silver casing, which papa brought me (with one like it for mamma), when at last he came safe back to us, after the terrible Crimean war.

"But oh !" continued grannie, looking at her watch, "I did not know it was so late. Good-night, my precious one ; you must run away quickly, or I shall be late, and keep grandpapa waiting for dinner."

CHAPTER II.

ELSIE was up betimes the next morning, as bright and bonny a little bird as ever secured a fine fat worm by early rising ; breakfasted, fed her doves, and took a walk on the common, which sent her in with what grandpapa called "quite a fine colour in her poor little pale London cheeks."

How glad Elsie was, now that she had had this little taste of country life, that papa had decided not to go back to live in London any more ! How eagerly she talked of "Willowfields," the pretty place just beyond Worcester, that mamma had persuaded papa to buy, in order that they might be within easy reach of the dear "grannies" and Aunt Ina ! What plans she made with Bonny of the walks they would take there, the pets they would have, and the little garden that Elsie would work in herself ! It was a never-failing source of interest to Elsie, and dear old Bonny, who liked everything that pleased her little lady, was always ready to encourage her chatter, and to be a sympathetic listener.

Meantime, the Malvern hills were very enjoyable, if only Elsie could accomplish that grand object of her ambition—getting up to the very top of the Worcester Beacon.

“You must ask your grandpapa to let you have a donkey to go up,” said Bonny. But, after all, it was not necessary to ask, for that very morning grandpapa inquired whether lessons would be over by dinner-time; and, hearing that they would, he told grannie that, if she had no objection, and the day continued as fine and cool as it was at present, he should choose a nice clean donkey, with a tidy donkey-boy, and desire both to be in attendance at two o'clock.

Elsie gave him a rapturous hug, and declared that he was the best grandpapa in all the world; and then ran away to Aunt Ina, who had undertaken the greater part of her *duties*, as Elsie always called lessons, in allusion to an old joke between her and mamma about “duty first and pleasure afterwards.” Aunt Ina was fond of teaching, and was very bright and amusing, and generally very good-natured; but she was not so patient as mamma, and had sometimes a quick, rather sharp, way of speaking; so that on the whole Elsie liked best the lessons which were dear grannie's especial department—her grave reading and her music.

However, this first morning *all* the “duties”

went well, and Elsie greatly enjoyed the part of English history they were reading now, namely, the reign of Edward II. She gloried in being half a "Scotch lassie," and a countrywoman of Robert Bruce, and liked to tease Aunt Ina by rejoicing over the result of the battle of Bannockburn.

Then Aunt Ina made up an amusing story over her division sum, about a certain number of little children who had a certain number of sugar-plums to be divided into equal parts. The writing-lesson, at Elsie's earnest request, consisted of the beginning of a letter to mamma, in which the first line was occupied by "My own," and in the second, "dear" had to remain all by itself, because there was not room to get "mamma" in comfortably. However, the letters were neatly and carefully formed, and there were no blots, which Aunt Ina cared far more about than getting a large amount written. All the lessons were well and happily finished before the dinner-bell rang.

At two o'clock, Elsie was by the garden gate, eagerly expecting the arrival of her donkey, which presently made its appearance. It was a mild-eyed, sleepy creature, led by a clean but rather heavy-looking lad about eleven years old. Grandpapa himself came out to see the little woman comfortably settled in the saddle, and to give the boy strict charge to be careful in the steeper parts of the

hill ; and then, with Bonny walking by her side, and Sambo, who seemed to consider the party entirely under his charge, bounding on in front, they set forth.

The donkey was inclined to be lazy, as all donkeys are ; but Elsie could not bear to have him beaten, especially when she learned from her escort that this was the third time that day that both had made the ascent of the "Beacon."

"You must get very tired," said Bonny, compassionating the boy's slouching walk, and no longer wondering he looked stupid and heavy.

"No, I bain't," was the answer. And he straightened himself and went on more briskly, and would have thumped the donkey to make him do the same, had not Elsie indignantly interposed.

"No, indeed ; you shan't! Poor old thing, it isn't his fault if he's tired, and can't go fast." And she stroked the long, patient ears kindly.

"You'd be a pretty old donkey if you were fatter, and your coat a little smoother! What is his name?" she added, turning to the boy.

"This un's name's Billy."

"And what's yours?" asked Bonny.

"Mine be Tom Higgs."

"And does the donkey belong to your father?"

He shook his head gruffly.

"Got no father. He died a year ago come Michaelmas. Donkey belongs to old missus."

"And where do you live?" asked Elsie.

"I boards at old missus's, up at the Wyche, all the week, but I mostly go home o' Sundays, to have a look at mother and the little uns."

"And where is home?"

"Over yonder at West Malvern. Mother takes in washing by the week."

Presently it came out, after a good many questions had been asked, and answered rather shortly and surlily, that "mother" was out of health, and often scarcely able to get through the hard work which alone sufficed to keep her and the "little uns" from want. Tom, the eldest of four, earned his food and some low wages besides, out of which it was his pride and delight to have a small sum to take home to mother as each Sunday came round.

"And is your missis kind to you?" Bonny asked.

The boy turned away, and busied himself with disentangling a briar from Sambo's curly coat.

"Plenty of work, and plenty of hard words about it," he said, on being pressed; "but I've got used to her tongue now, and don't care."

"And not much to eat, I'm afraid," said the kind-hearted nurse, looking at the boy's brown face, which seemed as if it ought to have been round and chubby, but had somehow grown pinched, and almost careworn.

But by this time they had reached a steeper part of the ascent, so that all the boy's attention was required for his charge. Though Elsie's firm little head was never giddy in looking down, she was as well pleased that some one should walk between her donkey and the steep declivity, on the edge of which he would persist in planting his feet.

At last, after a long, steady climb, they reached the very top, where Elsie thoroughly enjoyed the feeling of the fresh north-west wind blowing all around her, and threatening every moment to carry away her broad-brimmed, flapping hat. She dismounted, partly to rest the donkey, and partly because her little feet were aching for a run on that short springy turf.

Good-natured Bonny found some half-pence in her pocket, and laid them out at an old woman's cake-stall in a present of gingerbread for the poor hungry boy.

Coming down was great fun ; for there was a grand slide and scramble down the part where Bonny thought it was too steep for Miss Elsie to ride. It was amusing to see the manner in which the donkey picked his way when left to himself, always finding out the shortest cuts.

When Elsie was mounted again, there was a little more talk with Tom Higgs ; and by degrees it came out that though so big a boy, he could

neither read nor write, having had "no schooling" since "father's time," and that he had forgotten the little he knew before.

"Don't you even go to school on Sundays?" Bonny asked.

He shook his head.

"When a chap's been working hard for six days without stopping, he's glad of a bit o' rest on the seventh. But I do sometimes take Jack and Peggy to church while mother minds the baby."

"But you would like to know how to read, wouldn't you?" asked Elsie, not being able to understand how any one could be content with ignorance.

"Yes; I'd like it well enough. There's another boy as works for my missus that makes fun of me, for a great clumsy dunce. *He's* gone to school since he were a baby, and can read like the parson almost."

"And does he ever try to teach you?" Elsie inquired.

The boy laughed, almost rudely, at this question, and answered, "Bless you! not he," in a defiant kind of way, that made Bonny unwilling to encourage him to talk any more; but when they had nearly reached Mr Mordaunt's gate, he said, with an awkward attempt at civility that touched her—


"If the young lady should want to ride to-mor-

row, missus has got a prettier donkey than this un, which I'd try and get for her."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Elsie; "I should so like to ride again to-morrow. I'll ask grandpapa if I may. What's the other donkey's name?"

The boy said it was called "Fan." By this time they were at their own door, and Elsie skipped into the house to ask grandpapa about to-morrow's ride. Grandpapa liked nothing better than to give the little woman pleasure, and was besides much pleased to see the wonders which Malvern air was already working in her rather delicate looks. So it was agreed that, early on every fine morning, Tom Higgs should come up for orders.

CHAPTER III.

“UNT INA,” said Elsie, a few mornings later in the middle of her arithmetic lesson, “I wish I could teach !”

“You must *learn* first, Elsie,” was her aunt’s reply ; and nothing more was said until the sum was finished, and then Aunt Ina asked what had inspired Elsie with such a sudden wish to become a teacher.

“It’s the poor donkey-boy,” explained Elsie ; “he can’t read, and his father is dead, and he’s got no money and no time to go to school ; and that’s why I wish so much that I could teach him.”

Aunt Ina considered a moment, and then said, “He is a nice, clean, tidy-looking boy, isn’t he ? I’ll tell you what, Elsie ; if grandmamma approves, I don’t mind his coming to me now and then for a reading lesson in the evenings—say twice a week, perhaps.”

Elsie clapped her hands.

“That’s a kind dear auntie. He will be so glad to learn ; for he says he’s ashamed of being a great boy and knowing nothing, and the other donkey-boys tease him about it sometimes. And, auntie,

he's so poor, and works so hard for his mother, because she's ill, and can't work. And when I kept a bit of bread and butter for him from my breakfast this morning, he wouldn't eat it, but wrapped it up in his pocket-handkerchief to keep for his mother, because he said she did not often get such nice bread."

"He seems a good honest boy," said Aunt Ina. "I hope he does not beat the donkeys."

"Oh no! not Fan, that is; Fan's a dear little donkey to go; but Billy is very lazy sometimes."

"I am sure I should be lazy too," said Aunt Ina, "if I had often to carry little girls up and down that steep hill; but you may ask grannie what she thinks about my plan of teaching Tom Higgs."

Grannie saw no objection; and so, twice a week, Master Tom used to make his appearance about six o'clock, at the gate of Ellerton, and receive half an hour's teaching in the summer-house from Aunt Ina. He generally looked very shy and sheepish, and was not a very apt pupil; but Aunt Ina was very good-natured, though not very patient, and between scolding and encouragement the lessons went on pretty well, on the whole.

The boy, rough fellow though he was, insensibly felt the influence of the pretty refined lady who took so much kindly interest in him, and in his uncouth

way very nearly worshipped the good little fairy to whom he owed this kindness.

In the meantime, Elsis had plenty of other subjects to interest her thoughts.

"I have capital news of our travellers this morning," said Mrs Mordaunt, one day after the letters had been brought in ; "Elinor writes that the moorland air has almost set her up already, and that she and Archie have greatly enjoyed their scrambling life. Dear child ! I am so glad. We shall have her back, please God, quite her old blythe self again."

"Does Nellie send no message to the little one ?" asked grandpapa, observing the direction of Elsie's wistful eyes upon hearing her mother's name.

"Oh yes. Listen, Elsie darling, 'Tell my precious child that mamma liked her dear little letter immensely, and means very soon to write to her ; and papa sends no end of kisses to his own sweet bairnie.'"

"Well !" said grandpapa, "my letters are interesting too. Here is one to say that the boys will be home on Tuesday. Bless me ! I must see about Frank's pony having its shoes put on. How noisy the house will be when that boy is about it again !"

"On Tuesday, oh that is nice !" said Elsie's little voice, joyously.

"And why particularly Tuesday, pray, miss ?"

said kind grandpapa, stretching out his arm, and pulling her close to him. Elsie hesitated, and Aunt Ina answered for her—

“Because, if I’am not mistaken, Thursday is somebody’s birthday ; is it not so, Elsie ? ”

“What, so near eight years old ! ” exclaimed grandpapa, pretending to look astonished. “It is time to begin to treat her with respect, though she is a very wee white thing after all. But how is the great day to be kept, Miss Elsie ? ”

Elsie had no very clear ideas ; so it was agreed that grannie and Aunt Ina should talk it over, and settle it between them.

I hardly know whether it was grannie or little Elsie who counted the days most eagerly until the important Tuesday which was to bring home from Eton “the boys”—Elsie’s two young uncles, whom she had not seen for more than a year, and who used to treat her as if she were a very precious, but exceedingly fragile, little plaything.

Never were brothers more unlike. Vivian, the elder, was a tall, dark-eyed boy of sixteen—quite a man, Elsie thought him, with his tail coat, his silent, thoughtful ways, and love of study—nay, it was even whispered that Uncle Vivian wrote poetry ; and surely no one who was not grown up and very clever could do that !

Frank was three years younger than his brother

in age, and at least ten in character. He was a thorough specimen of a good-humoured, rollicking English school-boy—blythe and warm-hearted, but terribly careless—always getting into scrapes, and always getting out of them again, because no one could long be angry with him. He was devoted to Elsie's mother, who was his guardian elder sister, and particular *confidante*; and he had more thorough respect and admiration for her soldier husband than for any one else in the world. Although Frank's thoughtlessness often irritated his brother's proud, sensitive nature, he was so ever ready to make friends, and own himself in the wrong, that the tie between them seemed only strengthened by each dispute.

Tuesday morning came at last—a bright, fine July day. When lessons were over, Elsie was very happy and busy helping Aunt Ina to get the "boys' " rooms ready, and looking homelike for their return.

At luncheon time, grannie said that she meant to drive to the station to meet them, and promised to take Elsie with her.

"Then I shall ride," said grandpapa, "and let James lead Frank's pony down. The boy won't be happy till he has had a gallop on 'Firefly.'"

Punctually at four o'clock the carriage was at the door; and grannie and Aunt Ina were soon seated in it, with little Elsie opposite to them, in her pretty

fresh muslin jacket and frock, and daisy-trimmed hat. Grannie kissed her, and called her her dear little summer daisy ; and away rolled the carriage, the old coachman driving much faster than usual, in his glee at hearing the "young gentlemen" were expected.

They were at the station rather too soon, and had to exercise a little patience in walking about the deserted platform, till at last the puffing and screaming of the engine were heard, and the train rushed up as if it was in a great fuss at being late, and anxious to make up for lost time. Two bright faces appeared at a carriage-window, and presently, while little Elsie, bewildered and half-frightened with the sudden noise and bustle, was clinging fast to Aunt Ina's hand, and seeing nothing distinctly, she suddenly found herself lifted up in the air by a pair of rough good-natured arms, which had rather outgrown their jacket sleeves, as she heard a merry voice saying, "And this is the little mouse I remember! What jolly good friends we'll be, won't we, Elsie? I declare she's getting just like dear old Nell. It's an awful bore their being away these holidays."

Then Uncle Vivian came up and kissed Elsie, and spoke to her very kindly in his grand grown-up way, but somehow she could not help feeling very shy and afraid of him, and became quite silent when they were once more in the carriage.

Presently they heard horses' feet thundering behind them, and Mr Mordaunt and Frank came galloping by ; the latter took off his blue cap to wave it to his mother, his bright face all beaming, as he passed, urging his spirited little chestnut forward at full speed. Grannie looked very lovingly after him for a few moments, and then turned to Vivian and put her hand on his arm.

"You are looking pale, my darling boy ; I hope you have not been overworking yourself again."

"Oh no," he answered carelessly, "every one is apt to look seedy by the side of Frank ; the fellow is growing such a Hercules ! But I am not sorry to be back with you, dear old mater," and he squeezed her hand very fondly. "As to Ina, she has grown such a grand-looking lady that I am half afraid of her, and shall confine my attentions to this small woman," stroking Elsie's brown hair as he spoke. "And how is Mr Ward ?"

Vivian was speaking to his sister, but it was Mrs Mordaunt who answered—

"Mr Ward has been away, but I think he was to return yesterday. I want Elsie to make acquaintance with his little daughter. They are nearly of an age, and would be nice companions.

Elsie's eyes brightened at the prospect of a play-fellow, and she would have asked some questions about Mr Ward's little girl, but by this time they

were at their own door, with grandpapa and Frank all ready to receive them.

Then they all went into tea, the four elder to the drawing-room, but Frank good-naturedly followed his little niece, who was only too delighted to carry him off to her own domain. He was soon making both her and Bonny laugh immensely with his droll stories of schoolboy adventure, interrupting himself now and then to praise the bread and butter, and causing little Elsie's eyes to open wide with surprise at the astonishing number of cups of tea that Bonny had to give him.

Afterwards, he made Elsie come out and show him the tiny plot of garden which grandpapa allowed her to call her own ; and many wonderful schemes for its improvement were devised by Frank. Here, the rest of the party presently joined them, and both the boys were soon bestowing a hearty greeting upon Martin, whose round Ribston-pippin face looked rounder than ever in his delight at seeing them again.

"If you please, ma'am," said he, addressing Mrs Mordaunt, "I have a small dish of apricots ready. Should I send them in this evening ?"

Aunt Ina whispered something to grannie, who looked at Elsie and smiled.


"Not to-day, Martin, I think. We must keep the first apricots for Thursday, Miss Campbell's birthday."

Now, there are no apricots all through the summer that ever seem equal to the first that are ripe, and Elsie thought it was very kind of dear grannie to put off having them for two days in order to do her honour.

“What, is Thursday Mouse’s birthday?” cried Frank (this was his pet name for her in old times, because she was so small and quiet, and ran about with such quick little noiseless feet, and had such soft thick brown hair). “Well, I’m glad we came home in time, aren’t you, Vivian?” His brother only smiled and nodded; he was listening very eagerly to a description of a new horse that his father thought of buying for him.

Elsie stayed out in the garden till nearly her bedtime. She went to sleep with her mind very full of both the uncles, but with no doubt at all as to which she liked best.

CHAPTER IV.

HE next morning, when Tom Higgs made his appearance with the donkey as usual, Elsie's nurse could not help being struck with his sad and weary look. She questioned him as to the cause, and found that the poor boy had been up nearly all night. His mother had slipped down on the day before, and sprained her leg very severely. The pain, in her weak state of health, had produced fever, and she was fretting sadly over the loss of the only means of supporting her children, for her customers would of course have to employ other laundresses, as she was unable to do their work.

"Poor soul!" said kind-hearted grannie, when Elsie rushed back into the breakfast-room, full of Tom's tale of distress; "tell the little boy, I will come and see her in the course of the day. And Elsie, ask Mrs Groves to give him some bread and meat, to carry home for the little ones. And she might make some nice cool lemonade for me to take with me, if the poor woman is so hot and thirsty; that will be best for her."

Elsie did not ride that day, for Bonny suggested that it might be kind to let Tom go home, as soon as possible, to nurse his mother ; at least if his mistress could be induced to spare him after he had taken back the donkey.

"Dear grannie," said little Elsie later, when she met Mrs Mordaunt in her shawl and bonnet just setting out in the pony-carriage to visit the sick woman, "I have thought of such a nice plan. You know you asked Martin to keep the apricots for my birth-day, to-morrow ; but couldn't you take them to Tom's mother ? I am sure apricots would do her good."

"I think they might," said grandmamma, "and all the more if they came from a little girl, who was glad to give up her own pleasure in order to be kind to a poor sick woman. Run, darling, and ask Martin to gather them, and you may get a few fresh leaves to put round them. I will see if I can find a little basket to carry them in."

"Oh, that will be nice !" cried Elsie ; and she ran off joyfully, to help Martin to gather the rich golden fruit, which, when packed in cool vine-leaves in grannie's pretty basket, certainly looked a very tempting gift for an invalid.

"Mayn't I come with you, grannie, and see Tom's mother ?" asked Elsie coaxingly, as the carriage came round.

"I think not to-day, darling; I have several other places to visit, and I would rather go alone. I will bring you back word how the poor woman likes the apricots."

"What shall we do, Bonny?" asked Elsie, as the carriage drove away; "it is too hot to walk. Oh! I know; we will play croquet on the lawn. Grand-papa said we always might, if no one was using the things."

They were soon in the midst of a capital game. Elsie, who played better than most little girls of her age, was so engrossed in a difficult stroke which would probably decide the fate of poor Bonny's ball, that she never heard steps approaching, and did not look up, until she found Aunt Ina, her brother, and a tall strange gentleman with a long beard, standing close beside her.

"How tiresome!" said the former, rather sharply. "Elsie, you and nurse must finish your game some other time. Mr Ward has come on purpose for a match against your uncle and me; and we cannot wait."

"Oh! but mightn't I play?" pleaded Elsie. "There are only three of you, and I might be somebody's partner—I would take such pains—please let me."

"To be sure, little one," said the stranger quickly, before Aunt Ina had time to say "no." It will be all right; you shall be my little partner against your

aunt and Vivian ; and we'll give them plenty of trouble, I'll answer for it."

Aunt Ina did not look quite pleased, but she made no further objection, and Elsie determined to show her gratitude to her kind friend by playing her very, very best.

What a delightful partner he was ! How he croqueted Elsie through her hoops, and showed her how to place her mallet for a difficult stroke, and comforted her when she failed !

At last, thanks to Mr Ward, they really did win the game, to Elsie's huge delight. The others took their defeat very good-humouredly, and Aunt Ina seemed anxious to make amends for her former crossness, for she spoke very kindly to Elsie, and told her she would make a capital player in time.

"That she will !" said Mr Ward. "I shall get her to teach Florence another day."

"Oh !" said Elsie, looking up into his face very eagerly, "is that your little girl ? Because grannie said——" She stopped half-shyly ; but Mr Ward laid his hand on her head—

"Well, and what did grannie say ?"

"She said that perhaps you would let her come and see me sometimes. Will you ?" And Elsie looked up with those winning brown eyes, which so seldom met "no" for an answer.

Mr Ward laughed.

"Well, well, Flossy shall come. But you must be very kind to her, for she is a poor little waif and stray, you see—without mamma, or grannies, or uncles and aunts, to pet her, like some people. By the way, have you any other uncles besides Vivian and my friend Frank?"

Elsie said, "Yes, one uncle in Scotland."

Mr Ward smiled, and after looking round to see that no one was within hearing (for Aunt Ina had gone in to order tea, and Vivian was putting away the mallets) he added—

"How should you like some more uncles, eh! little one? Do you think Uncle Roger would sound well?" Elsie considered very gravely for a moment, and then shook her head.

"I don't think Roger is a pretty name," she answered, "at least not so pretty as Vivian, or so nice as Frank. But I should like some more uncles, if they were good-natured like you."

He laughed heartily, and patted her cheek; then Elsie beginning to be half-afraid she had said something rude, and hurt his feelings, put her hand into his, and asked when Florence would come to see her.

"Might she to-morrow? Might she come to tea? To-morrow will be my birthday."

"Will it? Then Flossy shall come certainly."

Just at that moment grandpapa came into the garden, and shook hands very heartily with Mr

Ward, welcoming him back to Malvern, and then they all went in to tea.

"All alone, little woman?" said grandpapa, as he met Elsie in the garden half an hour later. "Is grannie come home yet?"

"No, not yet," Elsie answered, so sorrowfully, that good-natured grandpapa asked whether anything was the matter.

"Oh no! only I had thought of something I should like so much to buy for Tom Higgs; and I wanted him to have it to-morrow, because it's my birthday, you know, grandpapa, and it would be so nice to give him a happy day; and if grannie had been home in time, I thought she would have taken me to the shop to buy it."

"And pray, why shouldn't I do as well? Do you think gentlemen can't do shopping, little lady? But first, what is the wonderful something?"

"Why you see, grandpapa, poor Tom has only got an old brown cap which doesn't keep the sun off his head. And Bonny and I thought I might buy him a nice clean straw hat, with a blue ribbon round it, like some of the other boys wear."

"And where is the money to come from?"

"Oh, I have plenty! I've two shillings, and a sixpence, and a dear little threepenny bit, and eight half-pennies! That is enough to buy a hat, isn't it, grandpapa?"

"More than enough, little miss, I should fancy. There, run and get your hat ; it is a beautiful evening. We can walk to Cox and Painter's, and take a fly back if you are tired. Make haste."

Elsie needed no second bidding, but flew off to dress, and in a few minutes was tripping merrily along by grandpapa's side. Another bright idea had come into her mind, while dressing, namely, that if all her money did not go towards the purchase of the hat, some of it might be spent at Mrs Need's, the baker's, in a nice large plum-cake for Tom Higg's hungry little brothers and sisters. Grandpapa suggested that it would go farther in a couple of plain loaves of bread, but poor Elsie looked so disappointed that he did not press the point, but silently resolved to add a contribution for his own share.

Messrs Cox and Painter were very civil to their little lady customer, and brought out all their stock of straw hats for her to choose from, and grandpapa waited patiently while she pondered over the comparative merits of blue, red, and violet ribbon ; the blue being chosen at last.

They then walked on fast to the baker's, and when they had made their purchases, and were about to take a fly to return home, grannie overtook them in the pony-carriage.

"Ah!" said grandpapa, as she drove up, "that is

all right. Now you can take the little woman home, and I can finish my business in the town."

"I found poor Mrs Higgs a little better, Elsie," said Mrs Mordaunt, as they drove homewards, "and she was so pleased with the apricots. Her face quite lighted up when she saw them, for a 'bit of fruit' was what she had been longing for all day."

"And was Tom there?"


"No; he was out with the donkeys; but his mistress had promised to let him go home at night. You cannot think how nicely the poor mother spoke of Tom. She says he is such a good son, and, with all his awkward rough manner, such a tender nurse when she is ill, and so careful of the little ones."

"I am glad of that," quoth Elsie. "I like Tom."

Then she told her grandmamma of her little scheme for to-morrow, of which grannie highly approved.

By this time they were at their own gate, and Elsie was soon afterwards sent to bed, to get a good night's rest before the important birthday.

CHAPTER V.

“OOD-MORNING, dear little missy! and many happy returns of the day! Here's the sun shining in so bright and beautiful to wish you the same!”

Elsie jumped up to bestow a hearty kiss on Bonny's kind face, which was bending over her crib. The doves were cooing their morning greeting, as if they too had good wishes to offer; and Mary, the good-natured housemaid, who brought up breakfast, had a broader and more beaming smile than usual on her face, as she wished Miss Elsie, “A happy birthday, and many of them!”

A pretty little flower-glass, full of rose-buds and mignonette, was Bonny's present, and was received by Elsie with an affectionate hug, and much admiration and delight.

Presently up came Mary again, smiling more than ever, and bringing a letter and two parcels; one fat and soft, and the other small and square, all addressed to “Miss Campbell.”

The large parcel was found to contain a lovely little cloak of real bright Scotch tartan, which

fastened in front with a small silver clasp, shaped like a thistle. In the small packet (which was really a tiny box) reposed, on some pink cotton wool, a locket of a single Cairngorm stone, set in silver, and containing a lock of bright brown hair, which Elsie would have recognised, even without the inscription, "For my dearest little daughter ; with a great deal of love from papa's heart, and a wee bit of hair from his head ; wishing her many, many happy returns."

The letter was from mamma, and was written in such a large clear hand that Elsie could read it quite easily :—

"MY DEAREST LITTLE ELSIE,

"Papa and I have both got rather sore hearts at being, for the first time, away from our precious little woman on her birthday. But as it cannot be helped, we are not going to fret about it, but mean to make the best of things ; and how nice it is that she has dear grannie and grandpapa, and so many kind, dear people at Ellerton, who will, we know, try to make it a very happy day for her. We shall think about her a great, great deal all the same, and pray (which is better than wishing) that God will bless her, and spare her to see many happy birthdays, and that each may find her happier and brighter and better than the last.

"Papa sends you, darling, a little locket, made of a Scotch pebble, called 'Cairngorm,' and I have cut off a nice little curl of his hair to put inside it. Papa says that it is very good of him to spare it, as he pretends he is getting bald; but I think that is only in fun. I have sent my Elsie something that will not be much use to her in this hot weather, but which, I hope, when winter comes, will make her look like a real little Scotch lassie. Cousin Flora has got one something like it. Papa and I have really another present for you, but it is too big to travel by post; so you must have patience till we come home, which will, I hope, be in another three weeks, or thereabouts. Shall not we all be cosy at Willowfields?"

"I am, thank God, so much better and stronger since I came here, that I feel quite young again, and hope, when I come back, to have my Elsie with me, and to be able to play with her as I used in old times, and to take up our 'duties' together too. Are you growing a very learned lady with Aunt Ina's teaching?"

"We are staying now with your Uncle and Aunt Macdonald, and I daresay you will want to hear about the cousins.

"First there is Flora, who was named after the famous Flora Macdonald, who saved the life of your favourite 'Prince Charlie;' then comes papa's

godson, Archie, such a fine manly little fellow, about your age ; and lastly, wee Marjorie, a droll little fat toddle, who often comes into my room to beg for stories about 'Cousin Elsie.' I hope they will all come and see us some day, when we are settled at Willowfields.

"I suppose that next to the children you will like to know the names of the dogs. First, there is Uncle Mac's dear old stag-hound, 'Rob Roy,' such a noble fellow, who comes and lays his grand old head on my knee, and looks up in my face as if he longed to be able to speak. He is my special favourite, and I think he knows it, and is pleased it should be so, for he often goes out with me for a walk, and Aunt Mary says it is very seldom that he will condescend to notice strangers. Then there is 'Dounie,' the children's pet, a long-haired Skye terrier, looking like a dog rolled up in a door-mat, and scarcely able, I should fancy, to see out of his eyes. Then comes 'Pepper,' a sturdy, independent, wiry-haired fellow, whose business is to guard the house ; he does not approve of being petted, and he allows no one to take liberties with him, except Marjorie, who pats him in a kind of grave respectful way, and says, 'Poor old dod,' and now and then he gives his stump of a tail a wag in reply. Lastly comes Aunt Mary's beautiful little terrier, 'Fly,' a delicate, graceful little creature, who is treated by the other dogs

very much as Marjorie is by the older children. And now here is Uncle Mac. calling me to luncheon. I must end this letter as I began, with every fondest and most heartfelt wish for my darling Elsie's happiness in this world and the next.

"From her own most loving mother,

"ELINOR CAMPBELL.

"*P.S.*—Grannie tells me that she hopes you will soon have a nice little play-fellow in Florence Ward. I am so glad, for Mr Ward and papa are great friends, and it would be nice that their little daughters should be friends too."

It took Elsie some time to read this letter. She felt rather an ache at her heart at the remembrance that the loving hand which had penned it was far, far away; but she did not want to let herself grow sorrowful on her birthday; so she folded it up, put it in her pocket, and ran across the passage to grannie's room, to claim the eight fond kisses which she knew were awaiting her. This was, of course, to be a holiday, but Elsie said her verse as usual, and then read the morning Psalm with grannie, which was a very happy beginning of the long-wished-for day.

Afterwards, as she went down-stairs with a bright happy face, she met her Uncle Frank on the second landing.

"Ah! little birthday queen!" he exclaimed, catching her up, and kissing her, "many happy returns to your majesty;" and as he spoke he held up something high above her head, which rattled and shook.

"Can you jump so high? No? Then there it is for you, little lady, with my best wishes, and so forth. I hope it will give you many sweet remembrances of me."

As he spoke, he lowered into her hands a large round box with a bright-coloured picture of a hunting party painted on the top.

Elsie opened it, after an eager kiss of thanks, and beheld a grand assortment of chocolates, sugared almonds, and other dainties, to which few little girls are averse.

"Frank, you foolish fellow, destroying all the poor child's teeth!" said his brother, who came out of the breakfast-room at that moment. "Here, Elsie, is my little present. I'm afraid you won't care for it much, but when you are older it may be useful. And I wish you a great many happy returns, my dear."

He kissed her as he spoke, and handed to her a little packet, in which was a tiny silver pencil-case, with a purple seal. Elsie was delighted, and assured Uncle Vivian that she was quite old enough to appreciate his pretty gift.

Grandpapa now appeared, and laughingly saying that his present was too big to go into a parcel, he led Elsie into the dining-room, where, on a square table was displayed a large board covered with green baize, and ornamented with small brass hoops, and painted sticks, while beside it lay the miniature mallets and balls belonging to the delightful new game of parlour croquet.

"Now, my little woman," said grandpapa, smiling, "I hope I shall not see quite such a disconsolate face next time grannie pronounces the lawn too wet for out-of-door croquet."

Elsie blushed, for she was rather ashamed of having been unhappy about such a trifle; but she gave grandpapa a very loving kiss, and said that he was "the darlingest best grandpapa in all the world."

"There's a boy at our gate with a donkey," said Frank, looking out. "What does he want?"

"Oh!" cried Elsie, "it is Tom Higgs!" And forgetting everything else, she rushed off in search of Bonny, who had taken possession of the precious parcels, containing the hat and the plum-cake.

Elsie, with some difficulty, managed to carry both, and hastened out to see Tom; and when she had heard that his mother was a trifle better, "and sent her duty and thanks to little miss," she shyly presented her gifts.

The boy's face flushed with pleasure at the sight

of the solid brown-crust cake, interspersed with currants.

"Jack and Peggy would be pleased *surely*," he said ; but when the straw hat was taken out of its paper and handed to him, he pronounced it "all over too good for him, and quite fit for a king." However, it fitted beautifully, which was better luck than Bonny had expected.

"Now," said Uncle Frank, who had followed Elsie to the gate, "I move that this young man goes home to look after his mother and the cake ; and that I enact donkey-boy to-day. Indeed, father," he added earnestly, seeing Mr Mordaunt look doubtful, "you may trust me ; I will really take care of her."

"I hardly know how to trust her alone with you, you scatterbrained boy," said grandpapa, shaking his head. "However, I believe you would be more careful of Nelly's child than of anything else in the world. Well, you may go, provided Elsie likes it, and you take Sambo to protect her."

"I'll tell you what will be rare fun," said Frank, just as they were starting, "to get a photograph done of you and the donkey and Sambo, as a surprise to my mother. Should you like it, Elsie ? There's a photographer at St Anne's Well, and we could manage it easily."

"Oh, what fun !" cried Elsie ; "but I think we should ask leave first."

"Oh no ; nonsense ! Why, if we did, it would be no surprise."

"But grannie told me never to go anywhere without asking ; and I know mamma used to say the same. Please let me go back and ask."

And poor little Elsie, in great dread of displeasing her favourite uncle and play-fellow, looked the picture of misery, as she tried to hold back the donkey, which Frank meanwhile was urging on.

"You tiresome little fidget," he said, half-angrily ; then, recovering himself, he added, "well, never mind—you are a good, little, conscientious puss. I'll run back and ask my father."

He ran into the house, and returned after a moment.

"All right, Elsie ; my father says we may. Now, Mr Donkey, step along a little faster, if you please ; I can't stand this snail's pace."

What a merry walk they had ! Frank had never been a more delightful or amusing companion to his little niece ; and though she could not fully understand all his stories of school-life, she was a capital little listener ; and her warm-hearted admiration, almost hero-worship, for her soldier father, made her ready to enter into every tale of daring or adventure.

When they reached St Anne's Well, Frank claimed an old acquaintance with the photographer,

and laughingly told him that he wished to have a family group taken of his little niece, the retriever, and donkey. The photographer, however, recommended that the latter personage should be left out, as the little girl and the dog would group better alone.

So Frank lifted Elsie off her saddle, took off her hat, and, rather to her dismay, ruffled up, instead of smoothing, her brown wavy hair, because he said, "he liked to have a good lot of it."

She was then shown where to stand, with one hand on Sambo's head, and told not to think about having her picture taken. This was not easy ; but Elsie did her best, and thought about all the pleasant things which came into her head, and especially how nice it would be to have a "surprise" to take home to grannie (Elsie dearly liked a little mystery). Presently she was told to keep quite still ; and the photographer began to count "one—two—three;" but unluckily at that moment a fly buzzed round Sambo's nose, a trial which no ordinary dog's nerves could stand. He jumped away from Elsie's side, and made a vigorous snap at the intruder. Frank burst into a fit of laughter, and the photographer was in despair.

However, in the second attempt, they succeeded better ; and a third picture was taken of Elsie sitting in a little rocky cleft, with Sambo lying at her feet,

and the ivy hanging down, and forming a very pretty background.

The photographer said that he could not let them have a copy printed to take home that day ; but Frank begged so hard, and little Elsie looked so imploring, that at last the man promised to see what he could do ; and said that if they would continue their walk, and return in half an hour, he would try to have a copy of each position printed. So they had a good scramble up the hill, and then returned, and found that the photographer had been as good as his word. Frank was critical as to the likeness, but Elsie quite forgot to look at herself in her admiration of her dear old Sambo's portrait.

It was nearly dinner-time when they reached home, and Elsie had only time to run up to grannie with the photographs. Grannie's delight was very great, for the portrait, though not particularly good, had given Elsie's little figure and attitude exactly.

When the roast chicken and cherry-tart were disposed of, grannie advised Elsie to come and rest in the arbour for a little while, as the day was growing very hot ; and then she gave Elsie *her* present—a very nice new edition of “ Andersen's Fairy Tales.” Grannie offered to read her one now while she was resting, and before long Elsie was so absorbed in the adventures of “ The Ugly Duck,” as to forget her birthday and everything else.

At four o'clock, Aunt Ina came to tell them that Florence Ward had come. "And now, Elsie," she added, smiling, "you shall see my present. I had not forgotten you, darling, but I could not get it ready sooner."

Florence Ward was only a year older than Elsie, but her womanly dress, and the grave, sedate manner which is apt to distinguish motherless children, especially girls, might have caused her to be thought much older.

She had black hair, and large, thoughtful, dark-gray eyes, like her father, and when she smiled, there was the same sweetness of expression which had attracted Elsie to her croquet partner. She was evidently feeling very shy, and making the most painful efforts to overcome her shyness. Grannie and Aunt Ina, after one or two vain attempts to set her at her ease, wisely resolved to leave her to Elsie's care.

"You will find me in the nursery, Elsie," said her aunt; "only you must knock before you come in."

"Another surprise!" said Elsie, laughing; and then she took Florence into the breakfast-room, and showed her the table where all the birthday treasures were displayed. Florence admired them all very much in her grave gentle way, and especially the Cairngorm locket.

"What a number of people love you!" she said, half-enuviously, as they went up-stairs.

"Yes; don't they?" said bright little Elsie, springing up two steps at a time; and then she remembered what Mr Ward had said about his little daughter's loneliness, and feared she might have been selfish in showing her all her treasures.

"Come in," said a gay voice, as they knocked at the nursery door, and in they went; but Elsie started back the next moment. What had Aunt Ina been about?

For some days past, Elsie had observed that an old cupboard which had always stood in a corner of Aunt Ina's room (and was supposed to be a receptacle for drawing materials, old books, &c.) was kept constantly locked. This cupboard was now standing in a corner of the nursery, and the doors were placed wide open.

And what do you think the inside had become? What, indeed, but the most complete and delightful doll's house in the world!

I will give a description of its arrangement for the benefit of any of my little friends, who may have kind mammas or aunt Inas to convert similar old cupboards into dolls' houses.

It consisted of two storeys; on the upper one, were a bedroom and drawing-room, divided by a wooden partition; there was a little door of com-

munication between the two, and in front of it a red silk curtain was hung, to keep off the draught.

The walls in the drawing-room were of a dark-blue colour, and nearly covered with tiny pictures. The fire-place had a white marble chimney-piece, on which were two little china figures, with a wee clock in the middle.

There were several little dolls in the room, who all appeared to be busily employed. Miss Rose was practising on the pianoforte; some music was open on the desk before her. Not far from her stood little Fred, making overtures to a waxen cockatoo, who sat on his perch, with his head drolly on one side. (I think Master Fred was a wee bit afraid of "pretty cocky," for he took care to keep at a respectful distance.) The "mamma," who was Elsie's favourite china doll "Elinora," otherwise "Mrs Vincent," sat majestically in an arm-chair, turning over the photograph-book on the centre table. Opposite to her, at the same table, her eldest daughter, Julia, was writing a letter; (the dear little ink-stand and blotting-book must not be forgotten in our description).

Miss Louisa, the invalid of the family (both her feet having been broken), lay on the sofa—she seemed to be telling a story to two of the little ones, who sat on the floor, and stared at her. Georgie had his arm round the neck of Floss, his

mamma's little white silk dog, while his sister Minnie sat with her doll on her lap. Miss Emma, one of the elder sisters, was working ; the pretty little work-table stood open by her side ; and any curious person who peeped into it might see the sweet little scissors and other fittings inside it.

All the dolls had been newly dressed in honour of the occasion. The carpet was made of ticking, on which, here and there, were coloured rugs and mats. The covering of the sofas and chairs was red satin, which accorded well with the pretty blue walls. Over the chimney-piece hung a looking-glass, in a gold and blue frame.

The bed-room, which was smaller than the drawing-room, will not require such a minute description. It had a fire-place, with a glass over it ; a pair of candlesticks on the chimney-piece ; a little wardrobe ; a chest of drawers ; and two little pink beds, in one of which Master Archibald Vivian Francis (the baby-boy) slumbered peacefully, with his big staring eyes wide open. There were, besides, a wash-hand stand, with a white jug and bason ; a large can and foot-bath, painted green ; a dressing-table, on which stood a looking-glass and a smart blue-and-white pin-cushion ; a high chair for Master Archibald ; several common chairs, and a square table, on which stood a tray with two breakfast cups. By the table stood Mrs Smith, the nurse-

doll, in her white cap and apron, ready to take Master Archie up when he should awake. From a nail in the wall hung a waxen bird-cage, containing a little canary.

The lower storey of the house consisted of a large kitchen, and shut off from it in one corner, a housemaid's closet, containing brooms, pails, a coal-scuttle, a dust-pan, &c. The kitchen boasted of a dresser, covered with bright tin dishes and plates; another on which stood sundry joints of meat, a pudding all ready for table, a half-eaten tart, and several dishes of fruit and cake. There was a kitchen-table, in front of which stood Sarah, the cook, who seemed to be making crust for a tart, to judge from the flour on the board and the rolling-pin in her hand. Anne, the housemaid, was washing up some tea-things at a smaller table. There were also a complete kitchen-range, pots, pans, and kettles of various sizes; a knife-tray, a safe, some chairs; and, lastly, a charming little three-cornered cupboard of old oak, which had been hunted up amongst grannie's curiosities, and which it was said she had played with herself when she was a little girl like Elsie.

Elsie's gratitude and delight may be imagined. Her aunt waited to explain all the details to both little girls, and put them in the way of playing with their new treasure, and then hastened away

to the summer-house, to make some arrangements, which Elsie secretly believed had reference to the birthday tea.

The children played very happily together for some time. Florence was so enraptured with the doves, that, but for the cruelty of parting the affectionate creatures, Elsie would have been unable to refrain from giving her one.

"Have you no pets?" she asked compassionately.

"Oh yes," said Florence; "I have our dear old dog, Muff, and her——" she stopped, coloured, and looked mysterious, adding, after a moment, "but she's papa's pet as well as mine, you know. I had some rabbits when I was at Uplands, but I gave them to my cousins when I came here to live with "papa."

"When was that?"

"Two years ago, when papa came home from India. Oh! it was so nice, having him back all to myself!"

"Weren't you sorry to leave your cousins?" asked Elsie, to whom a large merry party of children seemed the height of bliss.

"Oh no! I was very lonely there, and I never cared for any one like papa; but it is lonely here sometimes, too, when he is out."

"Do you do many lessons?"

"Miss White (that's my governess) comes from ten till five; and she walks out with me, and has dinner. I do two hours' lessons with her in the morning, and an hour in the afternoon. How nice it must be for you, doing your lessons with Miss Mordaunt!"

"Ye—es," said Elsie, somewhat doubtfully; "but not so nice as with mamma. Oh, I wish you could know mamma!"

"I wish——" and such a sad unchildlike look passed over Florence's face, that even her little companion noticed it, and asked if anything were the matter.

"No; I was only thinking how happy I should be if I had a mamma like yours. I can't remember mine a bit, you know; for she and poor little brother Charlie both died in India when I was a baby."

"I like your papa," said Elsie, who had vainly been racking her little brain for something cheering to say, "he is so good-natured and so funny."

"Oh yes! he is a dear, dear papa; but when he is out, I am so lonely. I should have so loved mamma, if she had stayed with us."

"What, long faces!" cried a merry voice at the door. "What are you two little maidens moping here alone for? Come out into the garden. 'Tis nice and cool there now, and we will have some

games. Miss Florence Ward, I am happy to make your acquaintance, and hope you respect me very much as Elsie's venerable uncle."

And under Frank's auspices a merry game of play was soon taking place, beneath the shade of the lime trees, while Bonny and Aunt Ina were occasionally seen making mysterious journeys to and from the summer-house, whither the children were presently summoned to tea.

A very pretty little repast it looked, for a tiny set of doll's tea-things in white and gold were arranged on the tray, and round each little plate was a wreath of the smallest flowers that could be found. The eatables were in larger plates, and looked remarkably inviting ; bread and butter in small, neat slices, finger sponge-biscuits arranged in a pyramid, and opposite to them another dish of crisp biscuits in various shapes ; orange marmalade, and raspberry jam in pretty glass saucers, the one surrounded with a wreath of jasmine stars, and the other with scarlet pheasant eyes. To crown the whole, as a centre-piece, was a white frosted cake, round which was a circle of eight little tapers of various colours, in honour of the mature age of the little birthday queen.

The children exclaimed with delight, and Florence, who already looked upon Aunt Ina as the cleverest of human beings, whispered shyly, "I am sure this

is your doing, Miss Mordaunt." Aunt Ina responded with a kiss, which called up a flush of pleasure into the little pale, earnest face.

Then Elsie proceeded to pour out tea under Bonny's superintendence, and Frank said he hoped they would not be astonished if he assured them that no less than thirteen cups of the size before him would satisfy his present requirements.

After tea, Mr and Mrs Mordaunt and Vivian came out to join them, and they had more games until about seven o'clock, when a firm, quick step was heard coming up the drive and along the walks in search of them.

"That is papa!" cried Florence, springing up, and in another minute Mr Ward joined them. "I could not offer you my good wishes earlier, little lady," he said, lifting Elsie off the ground and kissing her very kindly, "because I have been very busy all day, but I have brought you a little token of them which I hope you will not despise. It is in fact a joint present from Florence and me, but she is too shy to take the credit." And Mr Ward, as he spoke, put into Elsie's hand a little basket, which evidently contained something alive. Eagerly she opened it and peeped in; a little scuffle took place, and the something jumped out, and began frisking round Elsie's feet. It was—oh, could it be?—that long-desired object of Elsie's ambition, a wee white dog

white as snow, with a little foxy head and onyx-like eyes.

"Do you like him, Elsie? I do so hope you do," cried Florence, as her little friend stood speechless with delight.

"He is a spitz, a son of our dear old Muff's, and he will be so clever when he grows up. Muff often plays 'hide-and-seek' with me when I am alone."

"Oh!" cried Elsie, suddenly finding her tongue, "he is so beautiful! It is what I have always wished for! But," as a sudden doubt seized her mind, "may I really have him all to myself? Will grannie not mind my having him here till we go to Willowfields?" Grannie's consent had already been obtained, and Elsie, with her mind now quite at rest, tenderly hugged and caressed her new favourite. Bonny was summoned to admire him, and he was held up to be introduced to the doves, and told that they must all be good friends.


Soon afterwards Mr Ward said that it was time to take his little daughter home, but he hoped, now the ice was broken, that she and Elsie would often meet.

And then—even birthdays must come to an end at last, and, delightful as the day had been, Elsie began to grow conscious of a heaviness in her eyelids, which made it difficult to attend to anything. "Come," said grandpapa, "all the little birds are

gone to roost, and it is time that our bonnie birdie were in her nest too. God bless you, dear little woman! Good-night."

And, amid a chorus of loving "good-nights," Bonny carried off her sleepy little lady to bed, having first shown her the cosy scarlet-lined basket where Master "Snow" was to repose.

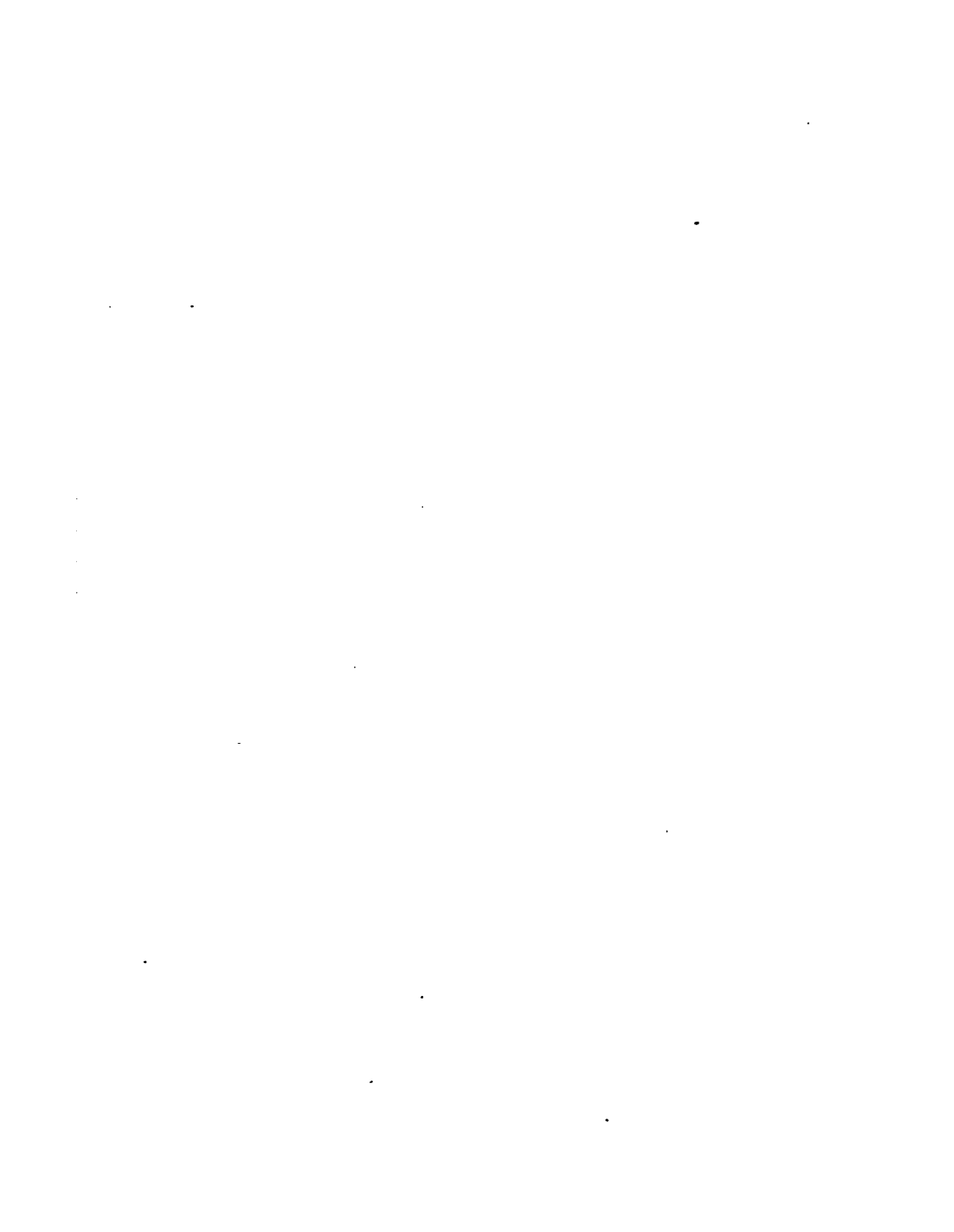
CHAPTER VI

 O any of my little readers know what a *big* heavy day the one immediately following a grand *fête* is apt to be! If so, they can enter into Elsie's feelings when on awaking the morning after her birthday, she had to tell herself that the great event to which she had so long looked forward was really over, and that for to-day, and for the next 364 days, she was of no more special importance than any one else!

But there were two great pleasures to look forward to still—becoming better acquainted with “Snow,” and with Florence Ward.

Elsie had never had a girl friend of her own age before, and therefore this was a great treat. Then Tom Higgs came as usual and reported his mother rather better, and “the little uns” in great delight over Miss Campbell's kind present. And he had his new straw hat on, which looked very comfortable, as there was a great deal of sun and glare.

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Page 61.

ing to her little dog, which had been shut up in the nursery that he might not disturb them. However, she really did take pains to fix her attention, and Aunt Ina saw the effort, and was an unusually patient and indulgent teacher ; in fact, once or twice it occurred to Elsie that Aunt Ina was altogether more patient and gentle than formerly, and she began to wonder what could be the reason.

After dinner, the boys were going to ride, and Uncle Vivian summoned Elsie to admire his beautiful new mare, "Lady-bird," which was being led up and down in front of the house.

Elsie was very fond of horses, and readily made acquaintance with the gentle glossy-coated creature, which ate bread from her hand, and seemed accustomed to be treated as a pet.

"She's the gentlest creature I ever saw," said Vivian, patting her. "Come, Elsie, let me lift you up, and you shall have a ride. Nonsense," as Elsie hung back and shook her head ; "don't be a little coward. You won't fall off, or if you do, I can catch you."

"I'm not afraid of falling off, but, indeed, Uncle Vivian, I must not, though I should like it very much."

"Mustn't ? Who said so ? Come, Elsie." And all the more determined to have his own way, in consequence of the child's opposition, Vivian tried to

catch hold of her. "Don't be silly. I am sure my mother would not mind."

"It isn't grannie," explained Elsie, "but I promised papa that I would never let any one put me on a horse without him."

"Did you ever hear such an absurd child?" asked Vivian angrily of his brother, who had now joined them, and was inquiring, "What was the row?"

"She says that Archie would object to my putting her on 'Lady-bird' just for three minutes, as if I were not quite as careful as he is, and as if this mare were not infinitely quieter than his great 'Rasselas,' that I have seen him lift her on scores of times."

"Come, Elsie," said her younger uncle, good-humouredly, "don't be obstinate. Do it to please Uncle Vivian, like a good little trot. Papa did not mean any of us when he asked you to make that promise. He meant grooms and careless people."

But Elsie was firm.

"Papa said *anybody*," she repeated, with her hands clasped tight behind her back, as if to steady herself against temptation, for it did seem very hard to have to vex her uncles and make them angry with her, besides foregoing the pleasure of finding herself on the back of that beautiful gentle creature.

"She is as obstinate as a mule," said Vivian, angrily, while his brother added, in a tone of contempt, "Poor little monkey, I suppose she is

frightened, and all this is only an excuse. Well, Elsie, I did not think that a soldier's daughter would have been such a coward."

Now this was just Elsie's most sensitive point, for there was nothing in the world she was prouder of than of being a soldier's daughter. The boy-uncles knew this, and were apt to tease her, though generally good-naturedly, about it. But to hear herself called a coward by Frank, in that sneering contemptuous tone, was too much, and the poor little thing had difficulty in restraining her tears, when just at that moment a protecting arm was thrown round her, and a voice said—

"Come, boys, 'be off, and don't tease her any more."

Elsie looked up and met the kind eyes of Mr Ward, who had just come out of the house, and must have heard part of what had passed.

The boys both looked rather ashamed of themselves, and mounting their horses, cantered off without further parley.

Mr Ward turned to Elsie, who was struggling very hard not to cry, from the revulsion of feeling at finding her kind friend so near her.

"They were wrong to call you a coward," he said ; "you are a brave, true-hearted little maiden, and papa would be proud to see that his little daughter could keep her promise so well. Come,

don't fret about it any more ; boys will tease even little nieces sometimes, and I daresay they did not mean to be unkind. Flossy is in the drawing-room ; let us try to persuade your aunt to come out with her, and have a good match at croquet."

Elsie had very soon forgotten her troubles in the pleasant game which followed.

Mr Ward left Ellerton about five o'clock, but Florence remained to tea, which was a special treat to Elsie this evening, for Mr and Mrs Mordaunt and Aunt Ina were going to dine at a friend's house, some distance off, and were obliged to leave home early.

Aunt Ina came into the nursery while the little girls were at tea, and a very fair vision she looked in her white dress, with red and white roses in her dark hair. Even Elsie, who had often seen her aunt in evening dress, exclaimed that she looked lovely, and Florence's rapture was too deep for words ; only when Miss Mordaunt, after wishing Elsie "good-night," bent down to kiss her also, her lip quivered and something very like tears came into her eyes. She made a quick movement, as if she would have thrown her arms round Miss Mordaunt's neck, but checked herself, and only said "good-night" in her shy, reserved voice.

Aunt Ina lingered a moment, and stroked Florence's hair very kindly, and seemed about to say

something, but her father's voice was heard calling her.

Grannie looked in to see the little girls for a moment, and both hastened down.

"She is like a princess in a fairy tale," cried Florence, as the door closed,— "like the beautiful 'Snowdrop' in the story of the magic looking-glass. Oh ! I wish that I lived with her always, and that she loved me as she does you, Elsie !"

"Ah, but," said Elsie, returning to her old axiom, "you *should* see mamma."

At this moment a gay voice was heard on the stairs ; there came a knock at the door, and Frank's good-natured face looked in.

"Tea all gone ? Not a drop left for poor me ? No ; never mind," as Bonny, who was very fond of him, would have gone in quest of more hot water ; "I don't deserve any for coming so late. But come down, young women, if you have finished, and have a game of 'I spy' in the garden. Vivian is there, and we'll make him play too."

And wonderful to relate, Uncle Vivian did actually so far lay aside his dignity as to become the most delightful of playmates : and when, after Florence had gone home, his little niece came to wish him "good-night," his kiss had in it far more of affection than usual, and almost (strange as little Elsie would have thought it) something of respect.

CHAPTER VII.

"MINNA dear," said grandmamma one morning, "I
I have had a letter from our old friend,
Lady Wentworth. She says that they are
going to spend a day or two in Malvern, next week,
on their way home from London. I have been
thinking what hospitality we can show them. I fear
their dining here is out of the question, but we will
try and get them to luncheon, and I thought it
would be nice to ask the children to drink tea with
Elsie. She says the three oldest will be with them,
and they, with Florence Ward and Elsie, will make
a nice little party."

Elsie was very pleased, although a little alarmed
at the prospect of so many playfellows, but all her
fears vanished when they arrived, and she saw the
pleasant sunny countenance of Minna Wentworth,
who, though only eleven, had long been accustomed
to act as deputy-mother to the little ones.

Behind her came Cecil, aged nine, a round-faced,
rather solemn-looking boy, yet with a twinkle in
the corner of his eyes, as if he *could* laugh when

the occasion warranted it. Lastly came little Carrie, who was about Elsie's age, and seemed a great pet with her elders.

They had all shaken hands and asked each others' names, and were standing together in a demure, half-frightened group, when Aunt Ina's voice broke in upon the awkward pause—

"Well, young folks, you look as grave as if you had the affairs of the nation to settle. Suppose we come into the dining-room. I have had the table wheeled into the conservatory to give us more space, for I fear the grass is too wet to play out of doors."

"We will begin with 'Turn the trencher,'" continued Aunt Ina. "That will shake us out of our company manners; don't you think so, Cecil?" laughingly patting that young gentleman on the shoulder. "Run, Elsie dear, and ask Warner if he can spare us the great wooden bread-plate; and Flossy will help me to put the chairs round the room. Now we must all take the names of different flowers—Minna shall be a rose, Cecil a sun-flower, Florence a geranium, little Carrie a daisy, and Elsie a cowslip. Oh! I forgot; I must be one myself—I'll be forget-me-not. Now then, attention! I want a——sun-flower!

And Aunt Ina gives the trencher a vigorous spin and runs back to her place before lazy Master Cecil has time to get off his chair.

"O Cecil, a forfeit! The trencher had stopped spinning before you caught it. But we will let you off this time, as it is the first."

But as I hope that most of my little readers have often enjoyed a merry afternoon's play of the same kind, I shall not stay to describe the rest of "Turn the trencher," nor the other games which followed. How the children "hunted the slipper," until Aunt Ina declared that she was too cramped to sit on the ground any longer; how, in "Post," Cecil *would* get caught on purpose, because he wanted to be "blind man," and the letters seemed to be always passing between Cape Town and Spitzbergen (Aunt Ina and little Carrie).

Then what a delightful story Aunt Ina told about the adventures of the "Family Coach," and how she kept one and all constantly jumping up from their places and turning round! In fact, Florence, as drag, protested that Aunt Ina's coach was always going down hill, and poor little Elsie, who was the coach door, was kept so continually opening and shutting that she grew quite giddy. The horses, (represented by Cecil) were made to perform so many feats of kicking over the traces, breaking the harness, and running away, that it would certainly have been very remarkable if the persons inside the coach ever reached home in tolerable safety.

Dumb Crambo followed, in which Aunt Ina acted

so beautifully, and elicited such shouts of laughter, that she had to do double duty, since neither party could spare her from their "side." Oh! how delighted were Minna and Elsie, when, after laying their heads together for a difficult word, they succeeded in discovering one rhyming to "hat;" and the others having vainly acted, "pat, mat, flat, rat, cat, &c., &c., and of course being ignominiously hissed after each failure, had to confess that somehow "sprat" had never occurred to any of them!

By this time tea was ready, and Bonny came to summon the children. Aunt Ina, who looked very funny and mysterious, whispered to Elsie to keep them in the nursery afterwards, until she came to call them.

Elsie was very full of curiosity, but she had the discretion not to impart her guesses to any one except Florence and Minna Wentworth, who could not at all imagine what Aunt Ina meant, but who agreed in thinking her the most delightful and amusing playmate they had ever had. They had not, however, long to wait after tea was over before grannie's kind face looked in.

"Well, dears! Have you all finished? Then suppose we go down. We have had an addition to our party since you came up-stairs,—His Highness Prince Minekin Finnikin Little-wee-short-legs. You will find him in the dining-room; and you need

not be at all afraid of him ; he is very good-natured to children ; in fact, *little* folks are rather more in his line than great ones."

The children looked at each other in bewilderment, but they were very eager to see this new arrival, and rushed down-stairs ; little Carrie, however, adhering to grannie's hand, and feeling, if the truth must be owned, a little frightened.

The gas was lighted in the dining-room, and the crimson window-curtains drawn ; but on a table in front of them stood—what ? It could not be a man, for it was not more than two feet high,—but it had a head surmounted with an enormous turban of scarlet and white, a long beard, and a huge pair of spectacles, little feet incased in buckled shoes (suspiciously like grannie's slippers, Elsie thought for a moment), and hands perhaps *rather* large for its size, but which moved to and fro with graceful ease, and occasionally stroked and even pulled its long beard,—the latter performance occasioning, however, a very odd contortion of the features.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said this extraordinary apparition, speaking in a high squeaky voice, and with a strong foreign accent, "I have great pleasure in making your acquaintance. I have, as I believe my distinguished friend Mrs Mordaunt has already informed you, only just arrived from Timbuctoo and in my country one does not often see so many

leetle folks with such merry faces ; I say *leetle*, though you may think I am not very big myself ; but yet in my country I am sometimes thought one very tall man."

"But probably, your Highness," said grandpapa, who was looking on, and laughing as heartily as any of the children, "the people of your country have great minds, though their figures are not tall."

"Ah, yes ; the gentleman has hit it ; that is quite correct. One great mind in one leetle body. But I think I have something else to say to my leetle, I mean, my young friends here, have I not, Mees ?"

And the dwarf turned with an insinuating smile to Aunt Ina, who laughed and pointed to a basket which stood on the table beside her, covered with a shawl.

"Ah, yes ; but I am stiff in the back. My long journey have made the leetle back very stiff ; I cannot stoop down to my toes. Would the lady be so kind to uncover the basket, and hand me" (as Aunt Ina suited the action to the word) "all the leetle parcels underneath ?"

Oh ! how the children's eyes sparkled, and how they shouted with glee, as the uncovering of the basket showed a number of tempting little packets, wrapped up in white paper.

"Ah !" said the dwarf, as Aunt Ina presented one to him, "this for Mees,—dear, dear, the people in

this country cannot write,—they do direct topsy-turvy,—ah, now ! I can read it,—‘For Mees Minna Wentworth.’ ”

And the dwarf with a profound bow presented to Minna the parcel, which proved to contain a pretty little shell pin-cushion. The next was a needle-book for Florence ; then followed a knife for Cecil, a yard-measure for Elsie, and a wee china doll for Carrie. As each packet was handed to the owner, the dwarf made some funny speech, so that they all did nothing but laugh.

Lastly, Aunt Ina handed to him a paper-bag, full of sugar-plums, and with those his Highness pelted the children, making them scramble to pick them up. Afterwards he sang them a droll song, and then danced a hornpipe, which invoked much applause, and shrieks of laughter.

Then the dwarf observed that he was getting rather tired, and added that he must not take up any more of their time, as there was another distinguished stranger in the house who wished presently to pay them a visit. Aunt Ina whispered something to grandmamma, who therefore advised the children to wish his Highness “good-night,” and to come with her to the drawing-room. There they broke out into all manner of guesses. “Who was the dwarf ?”—“Where did he come from ?”—“Was he a real man ? and what *could* his feet be made

of?" Only Florence Ward looked wise and mysterious, and whispered to Elsie that she would tell her about it presently.

In about a quarter of an hour Aunt Ina came to tell them that their second visitor was in the dining-room, and would be happy to see them.

In ran the children, expecting to see some likeness of their little friend; but, behold! instead, a giant, at least nine feet in height, and broad in proportion, whose head threatened every moment to come into perilous collision with the gas-burners. He was dressed in a huge frieze coat, and wore under that a kind of long tunic, which again seemed familiar to Elsie's eyes. Was it not part of grand-papa's winter dressing-gown? On the giant's head was an old battered wide-awake, cocked very much on one side,—which Elsie was sure she had seen *some one* wearing in the rain that morning; and not even the corked eye-brows and moustache, and the attempt at a very fierce aspect, could disguise the fair face and merry blue eyes of Uncle Frank. But then—it could not be all himself,—he could not have been elastic enough to reach from that towering head to those enormous Wellington boots! But these seemed somehow to give Florence a clue, for after staring very hard at them for some time, she gave a little cry, and would have spoken her surmise aloud, had not the giant darted at her an indignant glance,

which at once frightened her into silence, and convinced her that she had guessed right.

The giant, "Mr Patrick O'Flannigan of Ballinahynch," as he called himself, was not quite so amusing as the dwarf, who, perhaps, had been right in his observation about great minds inhabiting little bodies ; but he made the children laugh heartily, and scream with mingled terror and amusement, when he pretended to stride after them, brandishing his huge "shillelagh." He seemed to be a little at a loss for fresh jokes, and looked once or twice piteously down at Aunt Ina for help. She noticed this, and took compassion on him.

"Now, dears, I think you must wish Mr Giant good-night, for Lady Wentworth's maid has been waiting some minutes.—Flossy dear, what are we to do about sending you home? Shall we ask the giant to take you? or would you prefer Prince Minekin Finnikin?"

Florence laughed, but did not seem to feel at all uneasy ; and when they were in the drawing-room she whispered to Elsie.—"I have found it all out! Papa was the legs of the giant, and your Uncle Frank was his head and arms—don't you see, he was standing on papa's shoulders, and papa's head was hidden under the frieze coat?"

"Rightly guessed, little woman," said her papa, who joined them ; "and what about the dwarf?"

“ Oh ! you were the head then, papa. I knew your beard in a moment, and your eyes in spite of the spectacles; but I cannot make out about your hands and feet.”

Mr Ward laughed. “ My feet were not feet at all, really, Flossy, but only my own hands with a pair of grandmamma’s stockings and slippers on ; and my hands—oh dear ! what merciless tugs they gave my poor beard—and I was utterly defenceless and unable to cry out—why they belonged to that rogue Frank, who was ensconced between the curtains behind. He is wise to keep out of my way to avoid the thrashing I owe him for his impertinence.”

“ Well, we have had a very happy evening,” cried both little girls, as they hung round their good-natured friend, who kissed them both, and then sent Florence away to prepare for their homeward walk.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ COMING home! grandpapa, Uncle Frank, do you hear? Grannie has got a letter, and papa and mamma are coming on Thursday! O grannie! do they say they are really coming for quite certain?”

“ We can never talk of anything for being *quite* certain in the future, my Elsie,” said grannie, quietly. “ It must be as God pleases, you know ; but you may remember it in your prayers this evening, and ask that dear papa and mamma may come back to us safe and well.”

There never was a happier little maiden than Elsie, when three days later she stood by the gate, which had been the scene of that sorrowful parting five weeks ago. Many a false report of wheels did she raise, and many a cart and fly on the lower road did she hope would contain her dear ones ; but they did come at last, and papa had sprung out almost before the carriage had stopped, and was devouring his little daughter with kisses. He then pretended to toss her like a ball up to mamma, to receive the

long, silent hug, which was Mrs Campbell's only way of showing her intense joy.

"My bonnie bairn," she said at last, holding her back to study the little face more closely, "how well you look! You do credit to grannie's care and Malvern breezes."

"And so do you to your Scotch mountains, Nellie," said Mr Mordaunt, affectionately kissing his daughter, as he helped her out of the carriage. "But here are the boys famishing for a sight of you. Frank has grumbled terribly at being defrauded of so much of your company."

"Oh, it is nice to be at home again," cried Mrs Campbell, as the loving party crowded round her. "And Ina darling!" Here a close embrace passed between the sisters, and a few words were whispered, which no one else could hear.

"Come, we must not all eat you up at once," said Mr Mordaunt. "Little Elsie has the best right to mamma this first evening; and they shall have tea together undisturbed."

"And I," said Major Campbell, taking his father-in-law's arm, "have something to talk to you about. You may come, boys, if you like. I want to see Vivian's new acquisition, of which he wrote me such a glowing description."

The gentlemen went off to the stable, and grannie and Aunt Ina very kindly kept out of the way, and

Elsie had "her own mamma" all to herself at tea in the nursery.

The doves and "Snow" were shown and duly admired, for Mrs Campbell had all her little daughter's fondness for animals; and then there were many stories to be poured forth into mamma's ever-sympathising ears about Tom Higgs, and the donkey, and the scrambles on the hills, and the photographs, and the lessons with Aunt Ina, and the music with grannie, and kind Mr Ward (whom Elsie loved next best to papa, and mamma, and the "grannies," and Uncle Frank), and his little daughter, Elsie's first girl-friend.

And, in return, mamma had plenty of things to tell of her life in the Highlands, and of Uncle and Aunt Mac. and the cousins, and the black-cock plume which they had sent Elsie for her hat, and the half-made promise that they would visit Willowfields this very autumn.

And then Bonny, who had lived with Mrs Campbell before Elsie was born, and knew every expression of her mistress's face, whispered to Elsie that "mamma was getting tired," and Elsie immediately took the hint; and in spite of mamma's half-laughing remonstrances, she was led off to her own room and compelled to lie down on the comfortable sofa, which grannie had arranged near the open window, with the roses and jasmine climbing round it, and making

the evening air almost heavy with fragrance. And then Elsie must be mamma's useful little handmaid and spread a shawl over her feet, and unpack her travelling-bag and dressing-case, and arrange her table, all so deftly and nicely with her neat little fingers, that mamma kissed her more fondly than ever, and said she was the dearest little waiting-woman in the world. When all this was done, Bonny suggested that Mrs Campbell should be left for a little while to rest quite quietly. Elsie was inclined to demur at this, saying that she would be as quiet as a real mouse and not talk a bit, if only she might stay and look at mamma while she rested. But mamma smiled, and said, perhaps Bonny was right, for she had a little headache, and the temptation to talk would be too great unless she were quite alone.

So Elsie ran down to look for her papa, and found him lying on the grassy slope in front of the drawing-room windows, making the uncles and Aunt Ina laugh with an account of his Highland adventures.

"Ah! my little woman," cried papa, jumping up, "come with me. I have something to show you."

He lifted her to her old place on his shoulder, laughingly observing that she was getting almost too heavy, and carried her off in the direction of the stable-yard.

"Now, Elsie," said papa, "I am going to blind-fold you; but when we are inside the yard, put out

your hand, and tell me what you can feel." He tied his handkerchief over her eyes as he spoke, and Elsie heard the big doors open and shut ; then a suppressed laugh from some one who stood near—she fancied she recognised her Uncle Frank's voice—and then she put out her hand boldly and touched — what could it be ? Sambo's shaggy coat ? No ; it was not curly, and she could feel long distinct locks of hair about on a level with her own chin. Then something soft was rubbed against her arm ; she gave a cry of surprise, the handkerchief fell off, and before her stood the shaggiest and prettiest of wee Shetland ponies, his little head almost concealed in his long black mane, and his soft nose smelling about in the direction of Elsie's pocket.

"He wants a bit of bread," said papa, patting him. "Master Donald is used to be made a great pet of."

Hitherto Elsie's delight had been too great for words, but now her exclamations of rapture burst forth.

"Papa—dear, dear papa—is he really for me ? Did you bring him all the way from Scotland on purpose ?"

"For you : your very own, my little daughter. And I have double pleasure in giving him to you since something Uncle Vivian has told me. It was only a little trial, my Elsie, a little temptation bravely



"Before her stood the shaggiest and prettiest of wee Shetland ponies."—

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resisted, but it is only little battles that such young soldiers can fight in their Master's cause, and I am glad that my little girl had strength given her to stand by her colours."

Elsie's heart throbbed high; such praise from papa, and so bestowed, was what she liked best; and between the happiness of his words and the possession of her beautiful pony, it seemed almost too much. For a moment she could only clasp him tight round the neck, and hide her face on his breast.

But now grandpapa, who had been in papa's secret, and grannie, and Aunt Ina came to admire the pony, and Elsie was lifted on him, and led round under mamma's window for mamma and Bonny to see.

Then grannie told Elsie of the nice little riding-suit, at which her maid and Bonny had been secretly working for some days, and papa promised that, if to-morrow were fine, he would himself take Elsie for her first ride.

"I think," said Major Campbell, "that I shall require a boy at Willowfields to take care of this little fellow and the pony that Elinor drives. Do you think that Elsie's friend, Tom Higgs, would do for the place? It would probably be a better one than he has now."

"Oh yes," cried Elsie; "that would be nice, for

then Tom would have better wages, and more money to send home to his mother. Do take him, papa ; Tom would take good care of darling Donald, I know, for he is so much kinder to the donkies now than when we first knew him."

"Well, we shall see," said papa, smiling.

A few days later, Elsie found that papa had been to see Mrs Higgs, and had made her very happy by a payment of part of Tom's first quarter's wages in advance, in order that he might be provided with a tidy suit of clothes.

The boy's own delight at obtaining such a good place would be difficult to describe ; but he always declared, that that hot day, when he had grumbled so much at having to make the ascent of the Beacon a third time, had turned out to be the blesseddest one of his life.

"What makes my little mouse so silent to-night?" asked Mrs Campbell, one rainy evening, as she stroked the little brown head leaning against her knee.

The first excitement caused by the travellers' return had passed away, but the deep quiet joy of having them *really* at home, of being able to see and be near them hourly remained ; and Elsie would often sit for a long time quietly by mamma's side, with a story-book in her hand, looking up every now and

then, to assure herself that her mother was there, and occasionally murmuring, "Isn't it cosy?" This evening, however, she had not been reading, but only holding her book open, and looking straight out of the window, as if her mind were full of some weighty thought.

"Mamma, I was thinking about Florence Ward. It is so nice having you at home again, and we are so snug together—and poor Flossy is so lonely! She does wish so often that she had a mamma of her own, and I am so sorry for her, mamma!" cried Elsie, struck by a sudden thought. "When people lose their wives, don't they sometimes marry again? And if Mr Ward were to marry again, would his wife be Florence's mamma?"

"Most likely she would call her so, darling. But what makes you ask? And what plan is your little mind revolving at this moment?"

"I was thinking how nice it would be if Mr Ward would marry Aunt Ina. Florence loves her so much, and thinks her so beautiful and so clever, and she is so pleased if Aunt Ina kisses her, or takes any notice of her. Mamma! what are you looking so funny about? Can it really be going to happen?"

"Yes, you little fortune-teller," said Elsie's papa, who had come into the room, unperceived. "Your aunt and Mr Ward are really going to be married,

and mamma, and I, and everybody are very glad about it."

Elsie clasped her hands and bounded high with delight. "O papa! Now Florence will be so happy. She will never be lonely again. And Mr Ward will be—let me see—my real uncle, Uncle Roger, will he not? And Flossy and I shall be cousins! O mamma! let me run and tell Bonny. Does Flossy know the good news?"

"Her papa promised to tell her last night. I daresay she will come here in the course of the day, and then you can talk it all over together," said Mrs Campbell. And the happy child rushed off to tell Bonny the grand secret, which that good woman had already guessed, and rejoiced over in private.

Very happy was Florence's quiet face that afternoon when she and her papa walked to Ellerton, and she was met by her dear Miss Mordaunt with almost a mother's kiss.

"We love each other already, darling, do we not?" was Ina's whisper, and the clasping arms told far better than words how precious was that love to the solitary child.

The wedding took place during the last week of the Eton holidays, and a very pretty wedding it was—the bride and bridegroom (as Frank heard several spectators remark) being the handsomest couple

that had ever stood by the altar of the grand old Abbey.

If Elsie was proud of her new uncle, as she watched his kind face and dark noble head towering above every one else in the church, what shall we say of Florence's feelings towards the beautiful creature in snowy robes and orange-blossoms, whose first thought on entering the vestry was for her dear little new daughter ?

Certainly, no one cried at that wedding, except from joy, for even to Mr and Mrs Mordaunt it was scarcely a parting.

Mr Ward had promised to retain his Malvern house for the present, though he might perhaps at some future time follow his brother-in-law's example, by buying a small country place in the neighbourhood.

In the meantime, while he and his wife were absent on their wedding-trip to the Lakes, Florence was to be Mrs Campbell's charge, and to accompany her and the rest of the party in their flitting to Willowfields the following week.

We may guess what happy plans were formed by the two little girls for their life there ; but we must not linger to hear how they were carried out, since the history of our little Elsie's summer has already occupied quite enough time.

Perhaps some day, when she is older and wiser, we may take another peep at her, in her pretty country home, and at Florence under the loving rule of her young stepmother ; but, in the meanwhile, they must both wish our little readers—

FAREWELL !

THE END.

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